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ABSTRACT

Students are invited to confront and discuss issues of injustice and intolerance by reading a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. During five to nine 45-minute sessions, students will: engage in critical discussions of shared texts and engage in independent reading of biographies to extend the literary experiences in read-aloud sessions; analyze and compare these shared texts in terms of genre, social and historical settings, conflicts, character development, and themes; explore the craft of the authors and artists, and discover the potential of the picture book for presenting complex ideas about the human experience; use intertextual links to build understanding as they read each new text in light of previous texts; confront injustices and inequities in the past and present as they discover the realities of social barriers then and now, and learn how literature can become a catalyst for social action: breaking barriers and building bridges; respond to shared texts and to independent reading experiences in group discussions and in Response Journals; and learn to formulate their own questions to generate critical study of literary texts. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A list of additional literature resources is attached. (PM)

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Literature as a Catalyst for Social Action: Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges

ED 480 240

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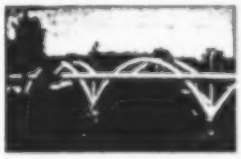
Grade Band

3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

Five to nine 45-minute sessions

Overview



Picture books are used to invite students to engage in critical discussion of complex issues of race, class, and gender. These books "show how people can begin to take action on important social issues . . . and help us question why certain groups are positioned as 'others'"(Harste, 2000, p.507). They challenge students to confront the injustice of social barri s that separate human beings from one another and to examine the role of prejudice and stereotypes in sustaining these barriers.

From Theory to Practice

Discussing critical issues such as prejudice and gender discrimination in intermediate grades can have a powerful impact across disciplines. The subject matter, however, may be entirely new to students of this age. Both teachers and students should be prepared to allow critical conversations to flow openly and honestly in the classroom. A number of essays on the subject can be found in

Robertson, Judith P. ed. 1999. *Teaching for a Tolerant World, Grades K–6: Essays and Resources.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Other valuable resources include

Benedict, Susan and Lenore Carlisle, editors. (1992). *Beyond Words: Picture Books for Older Readers and Writers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Harste, Jerome. (2000). "Supporting Critical Conversation in Classrooms." In K. M. Pierce (Ed.) *Adventuring with Books: A Booklist for Pre-K–Grade 6* (pp. 507-554). Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Moss, Joy F. (2002). *Literary Discussion in the Elementary School.* Urbana, IL: NCTE. (Pages 74-75 are most pertinent to this lesson.)

Saunders, Sheryl Lee. (1999). *Look—and Learn! Using Picture Books in Grades Five through Eght.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Student Objectives

Students will

- engage in critical discussions of shared texts and engage in independent reading of biographies to extend the literary experiences in read-aloud sessions.
- analyze and compare these shared texts in terms of genre, social and historical settings, conflicts, character development, and themes.

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- explore the craft of the authors and artists, and discover the potential of the picture book for presenting complex ideas about the human experience.
- use intertextual links to build understanding as they read each new text in light of previous texts.
- confront injustices and inequities in the past and present as they discover the realities of social barriers then and now, and learn how literature can become a catalyst for social action: breaking barriers and building bridges.
- respond to shared texts and to independent reading experiences in group discussions and in Response Journals.
- learn to formulate their own questions to generate critical study of literary texts.

Resources

- Biographies Booklist
- Interactive Venn Diagram
- Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard Biography
- Park Sisters Homepage
- "Teaching Children about Race" Journal Article
- Jacqueline Woodson Biography
- Interactive Story Map Tool
- The Ruby Bridges Foundation

Instructional Plan

Literature and Other Resources

- *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges (Scholastic, 1999)
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles; illus. by George Ford (Scholastic, 1995)
- *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson; illus. by E.B.Lewis (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2001)
- *The Royal Bee* by Frances Park and Ginger Park; illus. by Christopher Zhong-Yuan Zhang (Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2000)
- *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys* by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard; illus. by E.B. Lewis (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000)
- Biographies Booklist
- Response Journals

Session One

Preparation

Read aloud relevant segments (for example, the first twenty pages with photographs) in the autobiography of Ruby Bridges, *Through My Eyes,* as well as *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Robert Coles), a picture story book about this African American who, as a six-year-old child, became a pioneer in school integration when she broke a racial barrier to enter an all-white school in New Orleans in 1960. Ruby Bridges's story introduces students to the meaning of segregation and "barriers" that have separated American citizens from one another and to individuals who helped to break these barriers. It is important for students to explore the concept of social barriers, since it is this central concept that links the stories selected for this unit. The story of Ruby Bridges provides an historical context for the picture book that will be read aloud in the second session of this instructional unit: *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson. Background information about Ruby Bridges and Jacqueline Woodson can be found on the Internet at http://www.rubybridges.org/story.htm and http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/wood.html respectively.

Teachers will note that most of the session activities revolve around prompting questions for critical discussions on the books to be read. Each book, therefore, will be approached systematically, but all should feel free to adapt the question lists to best fit your and your students'

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classroom needs.

Session Two

Literature Connection

In the second session, the students listen to and discuss *The Other Side,* a picture story book by Jacqueline Woodson. This story is told from the viewpoint of Clover, an African American girl who lives in a town with a fence that separates the black side of town from the white side. Clover tells the story of the summer she becomes friends with Annie, a white girl who lives on the other side of the fence.

Questions to initiate critical discussion:

Prereading

1. What do you notice about the front cover? What do you think the title means?

Postreading

1. Who tells the story in this book? Why do you think the author used this viewpoint?
2. What is the connection between the "barrier" that Ruby Bridges encountered and the fence in *The Other Side*?
3. What is a "racial barrier"?
4. Why did Clover's mother warn her not to climb over the fence?
5. How did Clover and Annie work out a way around this racial barrier? How did they manage to "build a bridge" to the other side?
6. Why do you think Jacqueline Woodson wrote this story? What did you learn about this author that would help you answer this question?
7. What is the difference between this book and *Through My Eyes*? [Focus on genre.]
8. How did Ruby Bridges's story help you figure out the setting for *The Other Side*?

Responding to Literature

After the students discuss this story, they are given time to record their thoughts in their Response Journals.

Session Three

Literature Connection

The reading experiences prior to this session are intended to prepare the students for the study of *The Royal Bee,* a picture story book by Frances and Ginger Park. In addition, the students are invited to work with partners to search for information about Frances and Ginger Park on the Internet before this third read-aloud session. (Their homepage is at http://www.parksisters.com/.) *The Royal Bee* is the story of Song-ho, a poor peasant boy who is determined to learn how to read and write. He lives in Korea over a century ago, when only the sons of wealthy families are allowed to go to school. Song-ho finds a way to break this barrier and to take control of his own destiny.

Questions are introduced to initiate critical discussion:

Prereading

1. Examine the front and back covers, the title pages, and the Authors' Note. What do you learn about the setting, the central character, and the authors? [Note: Students can experiment with narrative elements such as character and setting using the Interactive Story Map tool provided.

Postreading

1. What kind of barrier is featured in this story? How is this barrier different from the ones featured in Ruby Bridges's story and *The Other Side*?
2. What action does Song-ho take to break through this barrier?
3. What action does the teacher take to stand up against injustice and help Song-ho build a bridge out of a life of poverty? What role do the students play in this story?

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4. Compare Song-ho's response to the final question at the Royal Bee with the response of the other finalist in the national academic contest. [Note: Students may choose to use the Interactive Venn Diagram for this and other comparing activities in this lesson.]
5. Compare Song-ho with Ruby Bridges and with Clover and Annie in *The Other Side*.
6. Why do you think the authors of *The Royal Bee* included their note at the beginning of this book?

Responding to Literature
After the students listen to and discuss *The Royal Bee*, they are given time to write in their Journals about their personal responses to this story, the nature of the barrier in this story, and the connections between the authors and their work.

Session Four

Literature Connection
The reading and writing experiences prior to this fourth read-aloud session serve as preparation for the study of *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys*, a picture book by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard, who was inspired to write this story by childhood stories of her grandfather. Students also work together with partners to search for information on the Internet about the author. You can also read her article "Teaching Children about Race" at http://www.radcliffe.edu/quarterly/199703/page28a.html.

Set in the post-Civil War South, *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys* is the story of a girl who is determined to go to school with her brothers who attend a Quaker school for freed slaves. Although her brother tells her "girls don't need school," her parents finally decide to allow her to go to school with her brothers. Her father tells his children, "All free people need learning—old folk, young folk . . . small girls, too" (unpaged). The author includes a note at the back of the book to provide information about the historical context for this story as well as its connection to her own family.

Questions are introduced to initiate discussion:
Prereading
1. Examine the front and back covers. What do you think is the setting? What clues about this story do the title and picture provide?

Postreading
1. Who tells this story? Why do you think the author chose this viewpoint?
2. What is unusual about the way this story is told?
3. What barriers are featured in this story?
4. How do individuals in this story break barriers caused by racial and gender stereotypes and prejudice?
5. Why do you think the author described the long walk to school in such detail?
6. What did you learn from the author's note at the back of the book and from her dedication?
7. Did this note change the way you viewed this story? How? Why do you think this note was not included in the front of the book as in *The Royal Bee*?
8. Compare this story with the other books we have read as part of this unit: Compare Virgie's father with the teacher in *The Royal Bee*. Compare Virgie and Song-ho. What different kinds of barriers have you discovered so far?

Responding to Literature
After the students listen to and discuss the book, they are given time to write in their Journals about their personal responses to this story.

Session Five

Literature Connection

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The purpose of this session is to introduce the students to a collection of biographies featuring "barrier breakers" and to invite them to select at least one book to read independently. The teacher presents a brief book talk about each title. The collection includes picture books, early chapter books, and books for advanced readers. Some titles on the list are

- *Teammates* (Golenbock and Bacon), a picture book about Jackie Robinson who broke a racial barrier when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and became the first black player in modern Major League baseball.
- *The Story of Jackie Robinson, Bravest Man in Baseball* (Davidson and Cooper), a longer book [102 pages] for more experienced readers.
- *If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (Ringgold).
- *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Rappaport and Collier).
- *When Marian Sang* (Ryan and Selznick) introduces Marian Anderson, the first African American to perform with the Metropolitan Opera.
- *The Ballot Box Battle* (McCully) is a picture book that introduces readers to Elizabeth Cady Stanton.
- *Babe Didrikson Zaharias: All-Around Athlete* (Sutcliffe) is intended for beginning readers too.

At the conclusion of this "book talk" session, the teacher introduces *Cracking the Wall: The Struggles of the Little Rock Nine* (Lucas). Explain that, like Ruby Bridges, the nine children featured in this book were the first black students to enter an all-white school in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. The last lines in the Afterword are particularly appropriate: "The Little Rock Nine helped to crack the wall. Now it is up to each of us to continue to tear down the walls that keep people apart" (47).

Responding to Literature
After selecting and reading one or more books in this collection, the students record their personal responses in their Journals and write about the nature of the barriers they identified, connections with shared texts, and insights and discoveries derived from their independent reading experiences. They also formulate two or more questions that call attention to what is of most importance in the book they selected. Each set of questions is then copied on 3" x 5" cards and placed in the pocket of the appropriate book. The next student to select this book will respond to the questions in his or her Journal.

Session Six

Students bring their Response Journals to this whole-group session and share some of their entries about the series of shared texts and the biographies selected for independent reading. Key ideas, discoveries, intertextual links, and questions are recorded on a chart next to the discussion circle. After the students have an opportunity to discuss these ideas and discoveries and to address the questions on the chart, they are asked to identify connections between these stories and their own lives.

Finally, the teacher rereads the last lines in *Cracking the Wall* and asks the students to write in their Journals responses to two questions: "What barriers do you see in your own world? What can you do to help break down these barriers and build bridges?"

Session Seven

The students bring their Journals to this final session and share their responses to the questions posed in the previous review session. As a group they explore ways that they could take action to break barriers they have identified in their own worlds and to build bridges from what is to what could be.

Web Resources

The Ruby Bridges Foundation

www.rubybridges.org/story.htm
Site of the Ruby Bridges Foundation. Students can read her story told in her own words.

Jacqueline Woodson
http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/wood.html
Biography of author Jacqueline Woodson, winner of the Coretta Scott King Honor Book Award for *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This.*

Teaching Children about Race
http://www.radcliffe.edu/quarterly/199703/page28a.html
Read the article "Teaching Children about Race" by children's book author Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard.

Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard
http://www.childrenslit.com/f_elizabethhoward.html
This Web page features a biography of Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard and reviews of her books.

Park Sisters Homepage
http://www.parksisters.com/
Site of authors Frances and Ginger Park.

Interactive Venn Diagram

Interactive Story Map Tool

Student Assessment/Reflections

Assessment is ongoing throughout this cumulative lesson. Objectives that are used to guide the development of the lesson plan also provide criteria for assessment of the students' involvement and understanding as readers, writers, and thinkers in response to literary experiences as the plan is translated into practice.

The teacher monitors the students' participation in the group sessions, their contributions to literary discussions, their responses to independent reading selections, and their Response Journal entries. Literary discussions provide opportunities for students to think out loud as they explore ideas together, discover new perspectives, and move toward deeper levels of understanding. As students think out loud, they provide teachers with a window into their cognitive processes.

At the conclusion of Session Six the students were asked to respond to two questions in their Journals. Student responses to these specific questions provide relevant information about what they have learned from this literary experience, their ability to move from analysis to synthesis in response to multiple texts, and their readiness to think beyond these texts to reflect on the realities of their own world and their personal responsibility to engage in social action as active participants in the community in which they live.

NCTE/IRA Standards

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their

understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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read•write•think

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Additional Literature Resources

Teammates by Peter Golenbock and Paul Bacon (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

The Story of Jackie Robinson, Bravest Man in Baseball by Margaret Davidson; illus. by Floyd Cooper (Gareth Stevens, 1996).

Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by Doreen Rappaport; illus. by Bryan Collier (Hyperion Books, 2001). (See also, the ReadWriteThink lesson on *Martin's Big Words*.)

When Marion Sang by Pam Munoz Ryan; illus. by Brian Selznick (Scholastic, 2002).

If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks by Faith Ringgold (Simon & Schuster, 1999).

The Story of Susan B. Anthony by Susan Clinton; illus. by Ralph Canaday (Children's Press, 1986).

Failure Is Impossible: The Story of Susan B. Anthony by Lisa Frederiksen Bohannon (Morgan Reynolds, 2002).

The Ballot Box Battle by Emily Arnold McCully (Knopf, 1996).

You Want Women to Vote, Lizzie Stanton? By Jean Fritz; illus. by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan (Putnam, 1995).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Leader of the Fight for Woman's Rights by Cynthia Salisbury (Enslow Pub. 2002).

Amelia Earhart: Pioneer of the Sky by John Parlin: illus. by Wayne Alfano (Dell, 1991).

A Picture Book of Amelia Earhart by David Adler and Jeff Fisher. (Holiday House, 1998).

Sally Ride, Astronaut: An American First by June Behrens (Children's Press, 1984).

Sally Ride: Shooting for the Stars by Jane Hurwitz and Sue Hurwitz (Fawcett, Columbine, 1989).

Babe Didrikson Zaharias: All-Around Athlete by Jane Sutcliffe; illus. by Jeni Reeves (Carolrhoda, 2000).

Babe Didrikson: Athlete of the Century by R.R. Knudson; illus. by Ted Lewin (Viking Kestrel, 1985).

Madeleine Albright by Megan Howard (Lerner Publications, 1999).

Sandra Day O'Connor: First Woman on the Supreme Court by Carol Greene (Children's Press, 1982).

Cracking the Wall: The Struggles of the Little Rock Nine by Eileen Lucas; illus. by Mark Anthony (Carolrhoda Books, 1997).

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